



HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE

Statement of Subcommittee Chairman John Katko (R-NY) Transportation and Protective Security Subcommittee

Insider Threats to Aviation Security: Airline and Airport Perspectives
September 27, 2018

Remarks as Prepared

First, I want to acknowledge House passage of a comprehensive, five-year FAA Reauthorization. This legislation also includes a full reauthorization of the Transportation Security Administration. This is the first time TSA has been reauthorized since the agency was stood up following the terror attacks of September 11th.

This bipartisan bill includes not only 22 House-passed transportation security bills, but also a number of key provisions from last year's DHS Authorization legislation.

I look forward to seeing this legislation move quickly through the Senate and to the President's desk, so that we can implement unprecedented transparency and accountability at TSA and make the agency more adaptive to evolving threats to the traveling public. Now, on to the topic of today's hearing.

When considering threats facing America's aviation sector, it is critical that we consider the security threats emanating from inside the sector itself.

Insider threats can manifest themselves in a variety of ways, including drug and weapons smuggling, human trafficking, terror plots, and others.

For example, in December 2013, Terry Loewen—an avionics technician at Wichita Mid-Continent Airport—was arrested by the FBI for plotting a suicide attack using a vehicle-borne improvised explosives device.

Loewen intended to use his airport credentials to gain access to the tarmac and detonate the truck near aircraft and the passenger terminal during peak holiday travel to maximize casualties.

In 2014, Eugene Harvey, a baggage handler at Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, smuggled 153 firearms, including AK-47 assault weapons, on 17 flights between Atlanta and New York.

Harvey was able to bring the guns into the sterile area of the airport using his Secure Identification Display Area—or SIDA—badge, because he was not subjected to physical security screening.

Additionally, in May 2018, ten airline employees at Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport were indicted as part of an FBI undercover operation. The employees believed they were smuggling methamphetamines.

One of the employees who was indicted indicated he would be able to smuggle guns as well, and another told undercover agents he would be willing to smuggling explosives for the right price.

Most recently, in August 2018, Richard Russell, a ground services agent at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport who held valid security credentials, entered an aircraft maintenance area and stole a commercial aircraft before crashing it order to take his own life.

Just last week, a student pilot jumped a security fence at Orlando Melbourne International Airport and boarded a passenger jet that was undergoing maintenance. While it is unclear what his intentions were, there remain access controls concerns surrounding that incident.

This string of disturbing incidents clearly demonstrates the risk insider threats pose to our nation's aviation system. I am concerned that the same vulnerabilities that were exploited in these situations could also be exploited by terrorists to carry out an attack.

Over the past few years, progress has certainly been made to address the gaps, especially with respect to pre-employment vetting and screening aviation workers before entering the secure area of the airport.

However, the fact that these insider threats continue to manifest would seem to indicate that the current system has not proven to be a sufficient deterrent for employees with malicious intent.

This Committee has passed multiple pieces of legislation dealing with aviation employee vetting and access controls including my bill, H.R. 876, The Aviation Employee Screening and Security Enhancement Act of 2017, which should be headed to the President's desk as part of the FAA reauthorization.

While this bill has many provisions that will help mitigate insider threats, this is not an issue that can be dealt with solely through legislation—and you all know it takes a lot for me to acknowledge that.

At this hearing, the Subcommittee has the opportunity to hear from a number of aviation stakeholders, with varying perspectives on how we can respond to insider threats.

The groups these individuals represent are on the front lines and have unique insight into how to best combat the threats facing our nation's aviation system.

I look forward to discussing how we can better screen and vet aviation employees and improve access controls to help ensure the sensitive areas of our nation's airports are secure.

I also look forward to hearing the witness' opinions on how the Federal government can better work with industry to address any existing vulnerabilities in our current system I truly believe that close collaboration between all the relevant stakeholders will be key in truly tackling the array of insider threats facing America's aviation sector.

I'd like to thank the witnesses again for being here today and I look forward to hearing their testimony.

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